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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [SENV](#) [KCOR](#) [SNAR](#) [PHUM](#) [PARM](#) [EAID](#) [PGOV](#) [CM](#)

SUBJECT: POACHERS BEWARE: CAMEROON'S LAST GREAT APE IS ON
THE PROWL

REF: A. 05 YAOUNDE 530

[B](#). 05 YAOUNDE 1732

[C](#). 06 LIBREVILLE 431

[D](#). LIBREVILLE 110

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[1](#). (U) Summary. Cameroon's Last Great Ape (LAGA) organization deploys passionate staff and proven law enforcement techniques to achieve spectacular results in prosecuting wildlife traffickers in Cameroon and, increasingly, the Central African region. In their unorthodox pursuit of wildlife traffickers, LAGA's investigators have found that the trade in protected species is linked to organized crime including internet scams and trafficking in drugs and illegal immigrants. End summary.

Actions Louder Than Words

[2](#). (U) LAGA's cooperation with Cameroonian officials has produced successful prosecutions for many years (reftels). LAGA's approach is collaborative -- LAGA works closely with the Ministry of Flora and Fauna (MINFOF) and even participates in Cameroon's official Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) delegations -- but with a strong dose of tireless nagging. LAGA staff say they succeed by forcing members of Cameroon's infamously corrupt and ineffective bureaucracy recognize that it is easier to comply with LAGA's demands for enforcement of Cameroonian law than to face LAGA's relentless full-court press -- media campaigns, phone calls, and hectoring meetings.

[3](#). (U) In 2006 this strategy proved successful as LAGA conducted more than 200 missions across all ten provinces, resulting in 43 court cases for an average of one wildlife prosecution every 8 days. LAGA's media-savvy operations generated more than 360 press stories on wildlife trafficking. LAGA boasts that stepped-up pressure on judicial officials has meant that now 87 percent of defendants remain incarcerated while awaiting trial. When MINFOF blamed fiscal constraints for lagging prosecutions, LAGA worked with MINFOF to reform the system, including by raising the damages awarded and identifying individual lawyers who were more effective for lower fees (in part by eliminating opportunities for nepotism within MINFOF's legal structures). One of LAGA's 2006 successes, where 9 men were arrested in Sangmelima for trafficking in ivory and leopard skins, established a number of important precedents: the first application of the maximum 3 years imprisonment for

wildlife trafficking, the first successful prosecution of military officials (who provided cover by transporting the items in a military truck) for wildlife crimes, and a new record for damages awarded to MINFOF--about \$35,000.

Trafficking: It's Not Just for Wildlife

¶4. (U) LAGA's investigators have found a direct link between wildlife trafficking and other forms of organized crime, including internet scams targeting Americans and trafficking in drugs and illegal immigrants. Trolling the internet for Cameroon-based individuals offering protected species, LAGA's investigators found a large number of wildlife-related scams linked to individuals involved in defrauding Americans with false claims of animals and even children for sale. According to LAGA, many of these attempts are fraudulent (i.e., the person offering the animal does not actually possess it), but they believe genuine traffickers are increasingly using the internet as well. LAGA investigators have also found that networks smuggling wildlife are also involved in narcotics trafficking; a January 2006 operation, for example, netted a young chimpanzee, 50 kg worth of marijuana and an indeterminate amount of cocaine.

Comment: The Last Great Ape: A Rare Species of NGO

¶5. (U) With spartan offices and no 4WDs or other traditional trappings of the development world, LAGA's style is more guerrilla than development orthodox, and the proven, quantifiable results similarly make LAGA stand out for its ability to prompt action from Cameroon's bureaucracy. Providing a welcome breath of fresh air in an environment

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where almost every meeting ends with a request for financial support, LAGA's Director, when asked in an April 4 meeting with the Ambassador how LAGA might use USG funds, replied: "Your money is less important to us than your political support." End comment.
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